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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

8077th meeting
Thursday, 26 October 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Delattre	(France)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to the Sahel region (19 to 22 October 2017)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council mission

Briefing by Security Council mission to the Sahel region (19 to 22 October 2017)

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by the co-leads of the Security Council mission to the Sahel region from 19 to 22 October, namely, Ethiopia, Italy and France.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of France.

At the outset, I should like to convey our deep condolences to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Government of Chad, following the attack on a convoy that led to the loss of life of three Chadian Blue Helmets today in northern Mali. The Security Council paid its respects to the memory of the Blue Helmets who died in the line of duty during its visit, and we do so again today. We also convey the same condolences to the Governments of the countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), whose people and security forces are regularly subjected to often deadly terrorist attacks.

The Security Council conducted a field mission to the Sahel from 19 to 22 October, during which it visited Mali, Mauritania and Burkina Faso. The visit was jointly led by France, Ethiopia and Italy and was part of the Security Council's close monitoring of the issue of the joint force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). One of the goals of the visit, which began the day after the issuance of the report on the operationalization of the Joint Force (S/2017/869), was to provide the members of the Council with a first-hand assessment of the situation on the ground and an opportunity exchange views with the various actors on the ground of the Secretary-General's recommendations aimed at strengthening international support for the Joint Force. We focused in particular on the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, in line with the Council's conviction that there can be no lasting stability in the Sahel without effective, comprehensive and inclusive implementation of the provisions of the Agreement.

It should be noted that the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, which was officially invited to participate in the visit, was unable to send a representative because of its heavy workload at that time. Nonetheless, the Chairperson of the Peace and Security Council expressed his great appreciation for the courtesy shown by the Security Council and indicated the Peace and Security Council's full willingness to participate in future visits. It seems to us that such a practice should be encouraged.

In keeping with the division of labour that we adhered to during the visit itself, I will provide an update on the visit to Mali, before giving the floor to my colleagues from Italy and Ethiopia, who will provide briefings on the segments of the field visits to Mauritania and Burkina Faso, respectively. We will each conclude our briefings by sharing the main lessons that we learned from the visit overall.

In Mali, the Security Council met with President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and several Government ministers, all of whom unanimously reaffirmed their country's commitment to making the Joint Force fully operational as quickly as possible. The visit to the Joint Force headquarters, located in Sévaré, in central Mali, allowed us to see that it is up and running. Much has been done in a short period of time in order to make the Joint Force operational. I refer in particular to the fact that the Joint Force has already achieved its initial operational capability and that the command post for the Central Sector in Niamey has been established, as well as to the high quality of the G-5 officers in command, not to mention the fact that it will be deploying its first operational mission in the next few days.

Our discussions with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the MINUSMA Force Commander allowed us to identify, from among the elements contained in the options submitted by the Secretary-General, those that could be achieved in the short term and that would need to be preceded by a strengthening of MINUSMA's capacity and therefore could only be implemented further down the line.

Our discussions with the representatives of the French Operation Barkhane and the European operations — the European Union Training Mission and European Union Capacity-building Mission in

Mali — allowed us to better understand the activities of the other international security forces present in the area and to assess their mutual complementarity. In particular, it became apparent that the force generation for the G-5 Sahel Joint Force was intended to enable MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane to implement their mandates.

With regard to the peace process in Mali, a meeting with members of the Monitoring Committee of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali was an opportunity for the Malian authorities to share the progress that had recently been made in the implementation of the provisions of the Agreement. In a joint document, the signatory groups deplored a lack of consultation with them on the part of the Government on this issue. In response to these statements, on behalf of the entire Council, I reiterated the strong message that we conveyed in our press statement on Mali issued on 6 October (SC/13019) by stressing the Council's expectation that concrete progress would be achieved by the end of the year. This message was supported by the Algerian presidency of the Monitoring Committee and by the representative of the African Union.

We held two meetings with representatives of civil society — one in Bamako and one in Mopti — that allowed us to directly address the concerns of the Malian population. They emphasized the desire of women to be more involved in the practical implementation of the peace agreement, and in particular to be better represented in the institutions responsible for monitoring its implementation, as well as the weariness of the population in the centre of the country with regard to the security threat it faces on a daily basis and its wish that the influence of terrorist groups in the region be combatted.

Finally, we also took part in a ceremony honouring the 146 peacekeepers of MINUSMA who have died while serving their mandate, which was held at the MINUSMA memorial in Bamako. Regrettably, there are now 149. It was an emotional time for the Mission and the Council delegation, and it led us to conclude that it was a good practice which should be observed during each Council visit to a country hosting a peacekeeping operation.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Cardi.

Mr. Cardi (Italy) (*spoke in French*): I associate myself with the sincere condolences conveyed by the President in the light of the loss of life of three Chadian soldiers deployed to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) who died, which is a reminder of the difficulties faced by peacekeeping operations throughout the world.

During its visit to the Sahel, the Security Council visited Mauritania on 20 October. Upon arriving in Nouakchott, the members of the Security Council were received by the President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Mr. Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. He was joined by a large delegation comprised of, among others, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence, the Minister for the Economy, the Chief of Staff of the Army, the Chief of Staff of the President of Republic and the Permanent Representative of Mauritania to the United Nations. The Security Council then visited the permanent headquarters of the Group of Five of the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) to meet with Mr. Najim Elhadj Mohamed, Permanent Secretary of the G-5 Sahel. Our discussions with the Mauritanian authorities allowed Council members to acquire critical analytical information, which allowed us to to pursue our reflections on the G-5 Sahel Joint Force and to expand our understanding of the security environment in the Sahel.

Mauritania, a key player within the G-5 Sahel and in the broader Sahel region, has long been fully involved in efforts of the G-5 Sahel's joint activities to combat terrorism and instability in the region. During our discussions with President Ould Abdel Aziz, the Security Council heard confirmation of the Mauritanian authorities' resolve to defeat and stamp out terrorism. Given the country's history on the front lines of the battle against this scourge, the Mauritanian authorities are well placed to assess the terrorist phenomenon, its expansion across the region over the years, its close links with illegal trafficking, its influence on the political agendas of the countries in the Sahel, and the need to combat this phenomenon not only with a security response, but also by using counter-narrative tools to deter radicalization. All of this was very enlightening for Council members.

Throughout our open dialogue, our interlocutors openly expressed their hopes of seeing the Security Council ensure robust support for the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. According to Mauritanian authorities, that

initiative, owing to its proactive stance against the terrorist threat and its mission to entrench its security capabilities in the Sahelian region, meets the priority and strategic demands for the countries of the region and deserves the full support of the United Nations and international community.

The motto appearing on the banner of the G-5 Sahel is "Security and Development". Accordingly, discussions with the Permanent Secretary of the G-5 Sahel, Mr. Najim Elhadj Mohamed were focused on those two dimensions. During a meeting in which the security vision was aligned with the goals of growth and development — which is the other pillar of the G-5 Sahel architecture — Mr. Mohamed told members of the Security Council that, in line with those ambitions, development must "immediately precede, follow and consolidate security activities in the region".

That premise is embodied in a development and security strategy whose principal components were illustrated to the members of the Council and that encompasses the priority investment plan, which the G-5 Sahel considers key to promoting growth in the Sahel and which will, of course, require significant international resources. Moreover, the meeting with the Permanent Secretary focused on the need to coordinate the work of various platforms focused on the Sahel, such as the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, with the specific demands and priorities of the countries of the region.

The messages we heard during our visit to Mauritania confirmed the shared aspirations of that country to build around the G-5 Sahel a security and development architecture for the region, with the Joint Force at its core. That observation was corroborated by the convergent messages addressed to the Security Council by its interlocutors, through which the various countries underscored the increasing insecurity in a region shaken by terrorism, illegal trafficking in persons, arms and drugs, and anaemic development. I believe that henceforth we should find common ground so as to strengthen support for the Force, which we hope — and I am speaking here in my national capacity — to be able to meet the ambitious goals of the countries of the region.

As a co-leader of the mission, I would like to conclude by sincerely thanking you, Sir, for having taken the initiative of organizing this visit under your presidency, which confers very significant added value to the discussions on the G-5 Sahel Joint Force and the Sahel region that have been held over the past several months. I should also like to add that we highly appreciated the work of the presidency, as main co-lead, in assuring the visibility of other colleagues and sharing the responsibilities associated with the mission. I also thank the host countries — Mali, Mauritania and Burkino Faso — which gave the Council in a warm and friendly welcome. I also thank the United Nations personnel based in New York who travelled with us, in particular the staff of MINUSMA and Special Representative Annadif, for their outstanding efforts to ensure the complete success of the visit.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Cardi for his briefing.

I give the floor to Ambassador Alemu.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I want to join you, Sir, and the representative of Italy in expressing our solidarity with Chad and in condemning the terrorist attack in northern Mali. What took place highlights the reason why the mission went to the region. It also highlights the need once again for robust international cooperation.

I wish to express our deep appreciation to the French presidency for its initiative to organize the Security Council mission to States of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). The visit to three of the G-5 Sahel countries — Mali, Mauritania and Burkina Faso — was not only very successful, but also an eye-opener. In our view, the visit undoubtedly has helped confirm the value of Security Council missions. In fact, we already knew the extent to which the situation faced by the G-5 Sahel States was grim, but seeing is believing. It is impossible to deny the particular and critical challenges that some of the countries are facing. What is needed is an urgent response, both from the Security Council and the international community, before the tipping point is reached.

The margin between where they are now and the tipping point is razor-thin. What could give relief to the G-5 Sahel countries is a holistic approach with a purview covering climate change, environmental issues and general development matters. There is simply no gainsaying the fact that the absolute prevalence of insecurity caused by terrorism and trafficking in drugs and persons, which fuel terrorism, have become scourges that those countries are hardly in a position to contain, let alone reverse, without the support of the international community. Therefore, the fact that there

is an urgent need for practical solidarity with those countries is self-evident. Failure to come up with an appropriate positive response would be disastrous and have huge implications for the international community, and that is also obvious.

The readiness of the G-5 Sahel States to do their share and discharge their responsibilities is also undeniable. In all three countries, the Security Council mission was received with open arms and was able to talk with the relevant officials, including their respective Heads of State and Government, who were not frugal with their time.

I should like to turn to the last leg of the trip, in Burkina Faso, which I had the privilege of leading. It was very symbolic of the purpose of our mission that we headed for Ouagadougou from the governorate of Mopti, in central Mali, where our last meeting was held with a representative of civil society. It brought home to us, in a very saddening manner, the extent to which the people of the region feel that they have no security — even when going to the market. The Government of Burkina Faso made the point of highlighting why we were there by taking us immediately upon our arrival to the site of the 13 August terrorist attack, in which 19 people were killed and 22, including security personnel, were wounded. The Homeland Security Minister received us there and subsequently stayed with us until the end of our visit.

Although the initial plan was to directly hold discussions with the President of the Republic, we had an opportunity to interact with his Cabinet Ministers, which was coordinated by the Foreign Minister. The Cabinet Ministers briefed Council members on how the security crisis in the neighbouring Republic of Mali to the north is affecting social and economic development in the already long-neglected part of Burkina Faso. They recounted the deliberate and targeted burning of schools and the killing and intimidation of teachers by terrorists and transnational criminals. We were told that 13 schools and two higher-level training institutions were not able to provide services because they were either totally destroyed or burned down. Terrorists, they said, were working around the clock to end the presence of service providers with the objective of undermining State authority.

The Ministers also emphasized that terrorist attacks had been increasing in frequency during 2016 and 2017, including through the use of improvised explosive devices as well as other makeshift mines, which are usually very difficult to detect. They told us that more than 100 people had been killed in about 18 attacks in different parts of the country, mostly in the North. They underlined the fact that more than 85 per cent of those attacks came directly from Mali. The Minister of Homeland Security described the Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger border triangle, in particular, as highly volatile.

One salient matter that should not be overlooked is how well organized and methodical the Burkinabé leadership is. It has a strategy for addressing the challenge that the country and the region are facing. Council members were briefed on what the Government is doing to address the menace of terrorism, including through efforts to eliminate conditions that are conducive to terrorism and the activities of traffickers and transnational criminals, with a focus on the Sahelian region of the country. In that connection, the Minister of Economy stressed that a separate policy and socioeconomic development strategy and plan are being prepared to address the crushing inequality in the Sahelian region. She also emphasized that as far as its resources allowed, the country was building the capacity of its security forces by ensuring access to adequate equipment and training and providing reasonably effective administrative services in every part of the country, with special focus on the remote northern and north-eastern border areas. However, she also said that the burden has been too heavy, the negative impact on the economy has been huge and the need for international cooperation is critical.

Council members then held a fruitful interactive dialogue with the President, who said that the only way that they will be able to succeed in the fight against the challenges of terrorism is through coordination with other countries of the region. He emphasized the importance of the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel and how critical it has become to their efforts, the same narrative that we heard both in Mali and Mauritania. He also informed us that his Government was actively participating in establishing strategic security corridors based on the shared objective of defeating terrorism.

With respect to the four options forwarded by the Secretary-General, the President made it clear that his choice is option one. He argued that after the Force's operationalization they would need sustainable and determined support. In terms of the challenges his country faces, he emphasized that every country of

the region, not just his own, suffers from the generally porous borders, which have become convenient for terrorists and criminals. He said that there was no alternative to the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel, urged for its speedy deployment and appealed to the Council for meaningful support as soon as possible. He underlined the importance of establishing a sustainable funding mechanism and creating a dedicated support office to be financed through United Nations assessed contributions. He reminded Council members that the problem of the Sahel region is an international crisis that should receive international attention and an international response.

In conclusion, as I said at the beginning, the visit was both timely and very necessary. The countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel have shown that they are determined to carry the burden of the problem as far as their capacity allows. Each has already made a first contribution of €10 million. Our visit to the Force headquarters in Sévaré showed us the degree of its readiness to get up and get going. The infrastructure there is ready, but there is a great need for support, and there can be no arguing that it is a need that the Security Council and the international community have a responsibility to respond to. I should add that we constantly reminded our interlocutors of the value of ownership and action on their part, in line with what is stated in the Mission's terms of reference.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Alemu for his briefing.

I shall now make some concluding remarks in my capacity as the representative of France.

As this meeting draws to an end, and in full agreement what has been said, I believe that I have good reason for saying that the Security Council's visit to the Sahel came at a particularly timely moment in terms of its work with regard to the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and was both useful and productive. For our part, we took away three main lessons from the field visit. The first is that the authorities of the three countries we visited unanimously underscored their political commitment to ensuring the quickest possible operationalization of the Force, together with a strong and clear call for increased international support, bilateral and multilateral. That political mobilization has been accompanied by significant progress on the Force's deployment on the ground, as has been mentioned. It will be important to ensure that in Mali it is accompanied by tangible progress in implementing the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, as was conveyed to the Malians during the visit.

The second lesson is that the our visit gave us an opportunity to emphasize the unanimous support of Council members to the Joint Force. The Force is seen as an essential response to the transnational nature of the security threat facing the States of the Sahel, but also as a complement to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and Operation Barkhane that will enable them to create an environment in which they can better execute their mandates. What we pointed out — and the members of the G-5 Sahel share our view — is that the Joint Force's security response, however crucial, must absolutely meet expectations in terms of respect for human rights and must be complemented by development efforts on the ground to ensure that it is not counterproductive.

The third lesson is that the real debate is no longer about whether the Joint Force is relevant or even whether we should be strengthening international support for the Force, but about how that support should be calibrated. Next Monday's Security Council meeting, which will be presided over by Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, France's Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, is being convened to tackle that very question through our discussion of the best way to strengthen the international community's support for the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel. In our national capacity, we will express our hope that we will be able to give the Joint Force the support it needs right now while taking account of the differing points of view of those around the Council table.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

Before we adjourn the meeting, on behalf of the Council I should like to express our appreciation to the authorities of Mali, Mauritania and Burkina Faso for their very warm welcome to us. I would also like to thank all of my colleagues on the Security Council, especially those from Italy and Ethiopia, for the genuine team spirit that was the hallmark of the mission.

Last but not least, I would especially like to thank the entire Secretariat team who worked to organize and ensure the success of the visit, both in New York and on the ground. I refer in particular not only to the

Security Council Affairs Division, but also to the teams in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs, MINUSMA, the Resident Coordinators in Mauritania and Burkina Faso, our interpreters and security officers — in other words, everyone who was involved. Their work was truly exemplary, and they played a key role in the success of this visit. On behalf of all of us, I am deeply grateful to them.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.